Czechoslovakia—Our Favorite New Republic

RECENTLY when Jan Masaryk, diplomatic representative of the new republic of Czechoslovakia, called on a business errand at a well-known Washington home, he was met by a woman whose thoughts were filled with linguistic uncertainty. Having no knowledge of the caller's native language she decided, after momentary hesitation, to try out her high school French in addressing him.

"Parlez vous Francais, Monsieur?" she inquired nervously.

"Oui, Madame," Mr. Masaryk answered with true Parisian accent. Then he smiled and added in correct Western American drawl: "But we'll get along better in English."

While Mr. Masaryk is a Czechoslovak to the manner born and bred, being the son of that country's most distinguished living citizen, he is almost an American, too. His mother is of 100 per cent American nativity, and all members of his family, including his father who is president of Czechoslovakia, and his sister, Dr. Alice Masaryk, head of the Czechoslovak Red Cross have spent much time in this country. He himself lived here for many years before establishing his country's legation in Washington about a year ago. He has had much experience in American business and industry. He speaks many languages, as do most educated Czechs, and his English is particularly good.

Young Masaryk, as he is often called, is counselor and charge d'affaires of the Czechoslovakian legation but has been acting minister since the legation was set up; he is in fact his country's first diplomatic minister to this country, though preceding the establishment of the legation there was a commissioner in charge of the affairs of the revolutionary government.

The new republic's legation is one of the most businesslike in Washington. Until recently it was located in a hotel but the rooms occupied there had all the appearance and actuality of up-to-date business offices. Recently the John R. White residence on N street was leased and is now headquarters for the legation. Though it has now taken on the quiet, dignified social atmosphere of the usual diplomatic establishment, it might be said that "business" is the keynote of its activities, as is the case now with most of the diplomatic establishments in Washington. While most of them still bear the aspects of places of entertainment and political negotiation, no effort is made to muff the click of busy typewriters that are kept going on matters of crass business and trade.

The business keynote is particularly obvious at the new ambassadorial ménages, for they have few traditions of old to maintain and are so weighted with economic problems that they are forced to reduce the old types of diplomatic activities to a minimum. With thousands of their countrymen threatened with starvation because of the lack of food, with their countries' industries at a standstill for need of raw materials, with credit situations sometimes bordering on the hopeless, the diplomatic agents of the "new" countries have little time for the pink tea sort of diplomatic operations.

The Czechoslovak legation has been quite successful. Largely through its efforts considerable trading has been established between it and this country. They have been buying much American cotton and recently shipped us several cargoes of sugar that had some effect in partially relieving a strain that was becoming critical.

But, as compared with what will probably be done when exchange and credit are again on sound footing, we have made only minor beginnings in trade relations with Czechoslovakia. In time, say those who are informed on the subject, there will be immense business operations between the two countries. The prediction is based on many sound facts, not the least of which is the popularity of each country in the realm and among the people of the other.

"Of the new republics created by the Treaty of Versailles, Czechoslovakia probably holds the warmest place in the hearts of Americans," says Raymond B. Fosdick, formerly under-secretary of the League of Nations.

The solid content of the popularity of Czechoslovakia with us is obscured somewhat by the name which that newly defined country adopted. While we have all heard of and admired the epic record of the Czechoslovak legion in Siberia and know that the country's revolutionary program centered very largely in America, many of us have only a vague notion as to where the country lies and of what it consists. Its name is to us outlandish, ultra-foreign, unfamiliar, remote.

If one will for the moment forget the term "Czechoslovakia" and think of Bohemia instead those difficulties will very largely disappear. Everybody knows something about Bohemia, which, though not all, constitutes the greater part of Czechoslovakia. The reason the country isn't known now as Bohemia is probably because it includes other territory, such as Moravia and Slovakia and a part of Silesia; also, as a dependency, Ruthenia or Little Russia.

Another reason is that Bohemia is only a geographical and historical term. The bulk of the people living in that ancient land do not call themselves Bohemians but Czechs. They are the most westerly and probably the most enlightened of the great Slav race. The term Czech—pronounced "Check"—comes from the name of the traditional ancestor of all of them. He is supposed to have wandered into the Bohemian plains about two thousand years ago, and there established a family which grew into a tribe and later into what for many centuries was one of the world's great nations.

But for three centuries, following the Battle of White Mountain, Bohemia was ruled by the Austrian Hapsburgs, as was also Moravia, which is peopled also by Czechs. The Hapsburgs also ruled that part of Silesia which is now included in Czechoslovakia, it having been at one time a part of the Bohemian kingdom. They ruled also Slovakia and Ruthenia which under the old system belonged to the Hungarian branch of the Dual Empire.

The Slovakians and Ruthenians, while of the Slavic race, are not Czechs. It is claimed, however, that they have many things, traditions, beliefs and, in part, language, in common with the Czechs of Bohemia and Moravia. But because the Slovaks are a very proud people and are in numbers second to the Czechs their name and that of their country was included in the term by which the new republic is known.

Neither peoples, however, constitute all the populations of their countries. Of the two there are about 12,000,000. But in the new republic there are some 3,000,000 members of other racial stocks chiefly Germans, Magyars and Jews.

Though strife has existed between these last named peoples, who occupied in great measure the position of conquerors and rulers, and the Czechs and Slovaks, I am assured that the constitution and the laws of the new republic give to the minority peoples full and equal rights.

Mention of the Czechoslovakian constitution calls to mind that which is causing the new republic to occupy high place just now in the minds of thoughtful people throughout the world. Under the leadership of Professor Thomas G. Masaryk, recognized as one of the world's great thinkers, many interesting social experiments are being undertaken by the new republic.

One of the first acts of the new republic, after it was able to function on its own soil, was to enact a universal eight-hour day and to grant equal suffrage to women. It also took over and divided up the big landed estates owned mainly by German nobles, but compensation was allowed.

It has a department of public welfare, devoted exclusively to social service. The department is directed by a minister of full cabinet rank, who, by the way, is a Jew. It has to do with all work bearing on social betterment, such as housing problems, the care of the aged, and of dependents produced by the war, the care of juveniles and the enforcement of regulations bearing on workers in factories.

The constitution is very liberal without being ultra-radical. Its authors paid America the compliment of copying the preamble of our Constitution almost literally, just as the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, which was drawn up by Professor Masaryk while a refugee in America, follows our own Declaration. It was signed in Independence Hall, Philadelphia.

The Czechoslovakian constitution might be described as a blend of the American and the French constitutions, with the addition of several liberal features unknown to either.

The president is elected by the parliament for a term of seven years and only the present executive, Professor Masaryk—who declined a life term—is eligible for re-election. The executive power lies largely in a responsible ministry of the European kind. The parliament has a lower house and senate. While all persons, barring the usual disqualifications, may vote for the members of the lower house, only those 25 years or more old may help elect senators, who must be 45 years or more old. Thus youth doesn't count for so much as we might expect in a country of such liberal tendencies.

Each house of parliament, in certain circumstances, may pass measures over the veto of the other, and each is bound to act upon the measures adopted by the other; otherwise those measures, after a certain period, became operative. Thus those deadlocks which sometimes cause our legislative machinery to stall are obviated.

While the Czechoslovaks have so far held themselves to a democracy of the liberal sort, their tendency is somewhat in the direction of radicalism of the moderate sort.

"Our recent elections," declared Professor Masaryk lately, "means practically socialization, or what some people call nationalization. It means state control of industries and public utilities. The workingmen will decide how they shall be conducted. For example, workingmen will be among the trustees of banks and will have bonds in factories. They will share the earnings. That is the tendency now. There necessarily will be a great variety of economic development for some workmen are ready for the change, and some are not."

The thoughtful world doesn't view experiments with radicalism by the Czechoslovaks with the dread that is aroused by like measures in Russia and some other countries. This is because of the confidence the country has in, and the consequent power held by, Professor Masaryk, who, though a philosopher and revolutionist, is a realist and insists that all progress must be slow.

"Politics must include not only an effort toward idealistic social establishments but also knowledge of how to establish ideal conditions," he said recently. "Democracy must guarantee political experience. The defects of parliaments arise from the defects of society itself. Experience is also necessary for socialization. For the change of the whole economic and social struc-

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Above—PRESIDENT MASARYK, of Czechoslovakia, who, on his 70th birthday, has been presented with a resolution, by the Parliament, electing him Lifelong President of the Republic. After his death the next president will be in office for a 7-year term only. Photo was taken on his 70th birthay.

Below—JAN G. MASARYK, son of Thomas G. Masaryk, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, has arrived in Washington. He has been appointed secretary of the Czechoslovak legation here and will serve as charge d'affaires, pending the arrival of Mr. Stepenak, minister of the new republic.